

[Conscientious Objector]

Beliefs & Customs - Folk Stuff [4?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank St., New York City

DATE November 7, 1938

SUBJECT REMINISCENCES OF A REBEL - CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

1. Date and time of interview November 3, 1938
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant John Turner This informant does not wish his name to be used
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc,

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See previous interviews Oct. 17 and 27th.

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NEW YORK

FORM B Personal history of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER WAYNE WALDEN

ADDRESS 51 Bank Street, NYC

DATE November 7, 1938

SUBJECT REMINISCENCES OF A REBEL: CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

1. Ancestry

Of Scotch-Irish descent

2. Place and date of birth

Mr. Turner did not care to give age, place and date of birth, or other personal information—as he does not wish his name to be used

3. Family

Apparently has none.

4. Places lived in, with dates

5. Education, with dates

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6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

7. Special skills and interests

8. Community and religious activities

9. Description of informant A well-built, apparently healthy individual, in his late sixties. Pleasant, agreeable. Great sense of humor—though cynical upon occasions.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Wayne Walden

ADDRESS 51 Bank St. New York City

DATE November 7, 1938

SUBJECT REMINISCENCES OF A REBEL [??] CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

My informant was a conscientious objector during the period of the War and declined to give me his name. "It's hard enough to hunt a job, as it is", he explained, "without making it still more difficult by naming myself as one who opposed the war." "Nearly everyone now agrees with what we C. O's said at the time; nearly every sane person now admits that the war was everything we predicted it would be; nearly everybody laments the loss of life and ruination the war left in it's wake- - they all now know that it was one hell of a

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big blunder, but they all still denounce and ridicule us for not going crazy too when they did. We still are an unhonored lot. Unlike those who marched uncritically and abjectly into the slaughter, our stand, as C. O's, was such that we as yet cannot also strut, brag and swagger as heroes. Of course, as things turned out, a long depression, with the "heroes" favored on jobs and civil service, we may have been foolish not to have gone crazy along with all the rest. But we, despite what they say, were certainly no cowards. The joy-ride over to France, with the cheers of the business elements and the flattering attention from the ladies, even though after a training spell we were thrown into the trenches, was more alluring than =/ 2 the abuse and misunderstanding, the starvation and rotting away in solitary cells, that many of us knew awaited us as objectors. Dont kid yourself, nor let anyone else kid you, about the C. O's being afraid of fighting; it took a damned sight more guts to resist the national hysteria than to fall in line with it. "And at that, there were times when we had no more assurance of emerging alive from the jails and penitentiaries than were the more glorified and subserviant guys in the trenches. After all, our refusing to be fed as fodder to the bloody war, was a financial saving to Uncle Sam. When, with is pants down, and dizzy with the clamorous demands upon him in the heart of the depression, we, at least, didn't bother him for a bonus!"

The following reminiscences are of actual happenings, says my informant, and none of them have heretofore been collected or published. If acceptable for inclusion in the folklore, but necessary to have assurance of the truth of them, the teller of these tales will furnish proof of their authenticity, so far as is possible.

"In Chicago, during the excitement attending the daily expectation of the United States entering the war, I was arrested on suspicion of being instrumental in opposing the preparations. The jailor, pausing before my cell, rather politely asked 'What are you in for?' I answered that I really didn't know, but that it was probably because they feared I would prevent the war. 'You mean to say that you're agin it?' he queried. 'I'm not particularly

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hankering for it', I replied. 'Why in the hell ain't you 'he asked," don't you know that the Kaiser, or Germany anyhow, has been tryin' to get a hold of this country for over 400 years?"

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Another time, two city and one government detectives raided my room. Having made a thorough search of my belongings, and apparently ready to leave, satisfied that nothing then warranted my arrest, one of the bulls spied the title of the book I was reading. It was Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment." 'UH huh! Crime and punishment, huh? Makin' a real study of it, huh? Readin' up all about it, huh? Come on! I was turned loose the following day. Possibly someone more learned, informed them that the book was not a treatise on how to commit crime and escape punishment.

A friend of mine, a Scotchman by the name of Mackay, was standing before a store window, trying to decide what shirt to buy. A buxom woman approached him and said: 'Young man, you look physically fit. Why aren't you in the trenches?' 'Madame' he returned, did you ever see me walk?['?'] 'No! somewhat pityingly, thinking perhaps he was already a cripple, 'No I haven't seen you walk.' 'Then just watch me madame', said Mac, as he walked swiftly away from her.

Some of the fellows, on visiting us in the can, tried to bring us in some literature. Some of it was Wobbly papers and similar matter, but most was as innocent of subversive ideas as the Literary Digest. The jailor, however, confiscated the entire bundle. Looking it over, and seeing Emma Goldman's "Mother Earth" most radical of them all he said, "Here, you can take in this farm book."

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A Pacifist strikes out.

Mac, too was a conscientious objector and a pacifist. And somehow or other he managed to have kept out of jail. I guess his arguments (like when he walked away from the irate woman) took the form of “direct action” more than they did of gentle suasion. Anyhow, not knowing what else to do with ourselves, Mac and I went into a show. This was out in Seattle where, like everywhere else, Patriotism, or some cheap exhibition of it, would pull applause for a ham actor when nothing else would. Then, of course, when a guy fluttered the flag, or the orchestra came to his aid with the national anthem, you had to stand up like everyone did. Sometimes there was so much standing up and sitting down, standing up and sitting down, that a fellow felt like greasing his joints with an oil can. Both of us had been tossed out of another place, for refusing to jump up, and lucky to have gotten out whole. It was a dangerous stunt not to imitate the rest, and many a poor rebel got beat all to hell by a mob for not conforming. Well, sure enough, the damned thing happened. The first thing we knew everybody was standing up while we were still sitting down. A scissorbill right in back of us started to raise a rumpus. He started in to prod us and bellow for us to stand up. Mac did stand up, but in arising he shot a swift jolt into the chin of the bloke trying to excite trouble. The clout knocked the guy off his pins, so that he tumbled back in his seat. 'What's tha matter, what's the matter', a lady wanted to know. 'Why', said Mac, 'that guy wouldn't stand up! So the bourgeoie lady also swipes the yap over the conk with her umbrella; and a couple of ushers trounces the dizzy scissorbill out of the place before a patriotic mob could have at him.

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The soapboxer ended his talk with: “The workers produce it all, why shouldn't they demand even some of the luxuries?” “And that's right”, shouted a wobbler, “Come on, Fellow-workers; let's take a walk on Fifth Avenue. Nothin's too good for the working class.” A SCOWL FOR SMILING NATURE

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This hasn't anything to do with my self. I recall it as a story, supposed to be true, told by, or of, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. In the old days, when she was an organizer for the wobblies and speaking for them around the country, she encountered one fellow-worker, a Swede, who for seriousness was hard to beat. The swedish Swedish fellow-worker occupied a seat with Gurley on tie train. For hours they had sat together, neither of them saying a word, she reading a book, and he, in lugubrious contemplation of a wage slave's existence. Having put down the book and for a time been [?] gazing out upon the scenery, as the train sped through a particularly beautiful section of Oregon, Gurley at last turned to her companion. Said she: It's certainly a pretty country around here, isn't it?" "Aw", said the Swede, "who the hell can enjoy anything under this rotten capitalist system."

Somewhere I heard this: "Are we men, or are we mice," asked the orator on the soapbox. And from his gathering a mighty answer arose. "We are," they thundered.
